

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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O R 211207Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8816
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 4128

EXDIS

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, MILI, PINT, LE
SUBJ: LEBANON: FORCED CHOICES

1. ACCORDING TO WALID JUMBLATT, LEBANON TODAY HAS THREE BASIC CHOICES: SYRIAN HEGEMONY, ISRAELI HEGEMONY, OR NATIONAL CONSENSUS UNDER PRESIDENT SARKIS. THIS VIEW IS WIDELY HELD, AND HAS SOME VALIDITY, ALTHOUGH IT IS AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION, PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS THE ABILITY OF THE SYRIANS TO IMPOSE HEGEMONY IN THE FACE OF ISRAELI OPPOSITION. ASSUMING, HOWEVER, THAT THESE ARE THE CHOICES AND THAT SARKIS IS GOING TO GIVE CONSENSUS ANOTHER TRY, HE HAS TWO THEORETICAL ALTERNATIVES: (A) HE CAN WORK IN A PURELY LEBANESE SYRIAN

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CONTEXT OR (B) HE CAN SEEK TO INTERNATIONALIZE THE PROBLEM BY INVOKING THE HELP OF THE SAUDIS, KUWAITIS, U.S., UN ETC.

2. THE SYRIANS PREFER THE FIRST COURSE, IF WE UNDERSTAND THEIR POSITION CORRECTLY. THEY DO NOT WANT THE PROBLEM "ARABIZED", MUCH LESS INTERNATIONALIZED, AND THIS WAS MADE CLEAR BY THEIR HOSTILE REACTION TO OUR INITIATIVE TO BRING

THE MATTER BEFORE THE SECURITY COUNCIL. SINCE NO ONE ELSE WILL PROVIDE TROOPS IN ANY NUMBERS, THE SYRIANS ARE IN A POSITION TO VETO EFFORTS AT INTERNATIONALIZATION WITH A THREAT TO WITHDRAW.

3. WORKING IN THE LEBANESE-SYRIAN CONTEXT, WHICH IS WHAT SARKIS HAS BEEN DOING TO DATE, IS NOT EASY. LEBANESE FEARS OF SYRIAN IRREDENTISM ARE REAL, AND LOCAL ATTITUDES MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR EITHER THE GOL OR THE SYRIANS TO FOLLOW A RATIONAL PROGRAM OF BUILDING NATIONAL CONSENSUS THAT ALL SIDES CAN LIVE WITH. INDEED, THE MORE THE SYRIANS GET INVOLVED IN THE EFFORT THE WORSE IT BECOMES, PRECISELY BECAUSE NO LEBANESE--CHRISTIAN, MOSLEM OR DRUZE--REALLY TRUSTS THEM. SOMEONE LIKE SULEIMAN FRANGIEH MAY COOPERATE WITH HAFIZ AL-ASAD FOR REASONS OF EXPEDIENCY AND FRIENDSHIP, BUT HE IS A LEBANESE IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS AND IS NOT GOING TO FOLLOW SYRIAN ORDERS WILLINGLY AND INDEFINITELY.

4. WITH SKILL AND LUCK AND DETERMINATION, A LEBANESE NATIONAL CONSENSUS COULD PERHAPS BE WORKED OUT. THE SYRIANS WOULD HAVE TO SHOW MORE FLEXIBILITY THAN THEY HAVE TO DATE, AND LEBANON WOULD NEED SOME UNPRECEDENTED LEADERSHIP OUT OF SARKIS. IT WOULD ALSO NEED A GENEROUS DOSE OF DIVINE INTERVENTION, AND THE COMBINATION OF ALL THREE IS UNLIKELY TO OCCUR. WHILE IT WOULD BE WRONG TO WRITE OFF ENTIRELY THE POSSIBILITY OF A NATIONAL CONSENSUS, PROSPECTS FOR IT
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ARE NOT GOOD.

5. THIS LEAVES THE TWO THEORETICAL ALTERNATIVES OF SYRIAN OR ISRAELI HEGEMONY. GEOGRAPHY AS WELL AS LOCAL ATTITUDES ARE AGAINST THE LATTER. IT WOULD BE MILITARILY AWKWARD FOR THE ISRAELIS TO INTERVENE ON THE GROUND TO SUPPORT A MARONITE-DOMINATED STATE, WHICH IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED THE LIKELY VEHICLE OF THEIR ASSERTING HEGEMONY. FURTHERMORE, WHILE THE MARONITES MAY CONSIDER ISRAELI INTERVENTION THEIR ACE IN THE HOLE, IT IS A REPUGNANT PROSPECT TO MOST OTHER LEBANESE, WHO WOULD PREFER SYRIAN TO ISRAELI DOMINATION IF FORCED TO MAKE THE CHOICE.

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 4128

EXDIS

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

6. HEGEMONY MEANS DOMINANT INFLUENCE OR AUTHORITY. THE SYRIANS ARE CERTAINLY THE DOMINANT FOREIGN INFLUENCE IN THE COUNTRY TODAY, ALTHOUGH THE LEBANESE ARE USING BOTH US AND THE ISRAELIS AS A FOIL AGAINST THEM. THAT DOES NOT MEAN THEY CONTROL THE PLACE, HOWEVER. THAT SEEMS TO BE BEYOND THEM, AND THEIR EFFORTS TO INFLUENCE LOCAL POLITICS HAVE NOT BEEN NOTABLY SUCCESSFUL IF SUCCESS IS TO BE JUDGED IN TERMS OF HOW MUCH STABILITY THEY HAVE BROUGHT TO THE COUNTRY. THILE THEY HAVE PERFORMED IN INVALUABLE POLICE FUNCTION, THEY HAVE DONE IT SPOTTILY AND IN A MANNER WHICH HAS EARNED THEM A GOOD DEAL OF ENMITY. THERE IS NO GETTING AWAY FROM THE SYRIAN CONNEC-TION, AND THE LEBANESE WILL HAVE TO LIVE WITH IT WHETHER THEY LIKE IT OR NOT, BUT IT IS BY NO MEANS CLEAR THAT THE
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SYRIANS CAN IMPOSE AN EFFECTIVE HEGEMONY OVER THE COUNTRY.

7. THE SYRIANS APPEAR TO BE EMBARKED ON A THREE-PRONGED APPROACH AT PRESENT: (A) CONSTRUCTING A NEW "BROAD NATIONAL FRONT" AGAINST THE LEBANESE FRONT, TRYING TO MANIPULATE SUCH LEADERS AS FRANGIEH, WALID JUMBLATT AND ABDALLAH SAADE; (B) SPLITTING THE KATAEB--(THE SYRIAN G-2 OFFICER FOR MT. LEBANON IS MEETING DAILY WITH AMINE GEMAYEL); (C) PREPARING FOR A

MAJOR MILITARY INTERVENTION AGAINST THE KATAEB AND CHAMOUNISTS
IF DIPLOMACY AND POLITICS FAIL (OR MAYBE IF THEY WORK, I.E.,
IF THEY CAN GET ENOUGH LOCAL SUPPORT FOR A HARLINE POLICY).
WHILE THEY MAY GET SUCH BENI OUI-OUI AS JOSEPH SKAFF (WHO IS
TRYING TO PROTECT HIS LAND HOLDINGS IN THE EASTERN BEKAA) TO
GO ALONG WITH THEM, AND EVEN WALID JUMBLATT, WHO SEES NO
ALTERNATIVE TO THEM, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS LEBANESE FEARS OF
THE SYRIANS ARE GOING TO MAKE A SYRIAN-SPONSORED "BROAD
NATIONAL FRONT" DIFFICULT TO CONTROL. FURTHERMORE, SPLITTING
THE KATAEB WILL TAKE MORE SKILL THAN THE SYRIANS HAVE SHOWN
TO DATE. THAT LEAVES MILITARY INTERVENTION.

8. THE SYRIANS MIGHT BE ABLE TO CRUSH THE KATAEB AND AHRAR
EVENTUALLY, BUT THEY WOULD TAKE TERRIBLE CASUALTIES AND
SHOULD HAVE NO ILLUSION THAT THE MARONITES WILL NOT FIGHT,
OR THAT MANY OTHER CHRISTIANS WILL NOT SEE IT AS A BATTLE FOR
NATIONAL SURVIVAL. WITH SOME FLEXIBILITY AND SKILL, HOWEVER,
THE SYRIANS IN COOPERATION WITH SARKIS, MIGHT BRING DOWN THE
LEVEL OF MARONITE OPPOSITION AND VIOLENCE TO TOLERABLE LEVELS
AND ALLOW LEBANON TO ROCK ALONG MORE OR LESS AS IS INDEFINITELY,
EVEN WITHOUT A REAL CONSENSUS. IT IS HARD AT THIS POINT TO
WRITE THE RECIPE FOR THIS, BUT THERE ARE SOME THINGS WHICH
WOULD HELP: (A) DISENGAGEMENT OF THE SYRIANS FROM BEIRUT AND
THEIR REPLACEMENT WITH THE LEBANESE ARMY; (B) LESS CLUMSY
INTERFERENCE IN LOCAL POLITICS; (C) HELPING THE LEBANESE ARMY
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TO REBUILD. THE LEBANESE BELIEVE THEY ARE DOING THE OPPOSITE.
(D) A MORE MATURE OR LESS PARANOID ATTITUDE TOWARD OTHER
POWERS, E.G., THE U.S. AND SAUDI ARABIA, ALSO ACTIVE IN
LEBANON; (E) UNDERSTANDING OF THE LEBANESE DILEMMA OVER THE
HADDAD AFFAIR AND SUPPORT FOR EFFORTS TO FIND A WAY OUT
THAT MARONITES AS WELL AS MOSLEMS CAN LIVE WITH.

9. I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER IT IS REALISTIC TO EXPECT THE
SYRIANS TO DO THESE THINGS, OR WHETHER THE GOL WOULD BE ABLE
TO PERFORM ITS SHARE OF THE TASK. IF THEY BOTH DO NOT,
HOWEVER, THE PRICE FOR ALL OF US IS LIKELY TO BE HIGH.
PARKER

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